

[A Modern Guild]

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A MODERN GUILD

Birnie Bruce, a secretary of an important granite association, sat behind his desk. His low, resonant voice carried well above the clicking activity of typists around him.

"I was born in Scotland," he said. "I came over when I was a boy of nine — about forty-five years ago. My father was a granitecutter from Aberdeen. By the time I was fifteen and through public school, he had already worked himself up from the bottom to manufacturer. After school hours and on holidays I used to help him picking up waste and doing odd jobs. My father was proud of granite, glad to be in the business, and I was proud at fifteen to be considered man enough to do a full day's work in the shed. At this time my father employed about 70 men.

"When he died in 1908 my brother and I continued the business — shed and quarry. My brother left the shed in 1915 to put all his time in the quarry. That was his chief interest. I'd been a cutter, the sheds were my life, I wasn't particularly interested in the quarry although I knew every single angle of the business, [since I went there every time we took orders for?] [stone I continued alone in the shed until 1930, and that year I sold my business to the Rock of Ages Corporation. I'm plant manager now, and also secretary to this granite association.?] 2 "This 'Barre Guild' represents the five largest quarry producers in our granite district, and we work with the manufacturers to adjust labor disputes and to protect the title 'Select Barre Granite.' The title to copyrighted, So, too, is 'Barre Guild.' Both are trademarks of our association. Unless a stone has passed the rigid tests qualifying it as 'Select Barre Granite,' the seal 'Barre Guilds' cannot be put on a finished monument.

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'Barre Guild' is used on every piece of granite work — big or small, whether marker or mausoleum — put out by our association. The seal to out into the stone by sandblasting. The 'Barre Guild' seal guarantees that the granite is free from all defects, and that workmanship and design are unsurpassable. Our association also given the purchaser a certificate of quality. This means — besides a guarantee of workmanship, material and design — that the memorial is genuine, first class Barre granite, and that it will not fade, chip, crack or disintegrate, and that no acids, oils, coloring matter, or any injurious cleaning fluids were used on the finished product. If any part of the memorial is found defective by the manufacturer, he agrees to replace it free of all expense. To be effective this certificate must be registered with the Barre Guild, and it is signed by both purchaser and retailer at our office. Many times a purchaser wishes to order a certain design for a monument, or suggests one that isn't a credit to our memorials; we try to show him his error and so keep the designs up to a high standard. We have refused the seal to many monuments. Some of the most noted memorials of Barre granite are: Booth Tarkington's; John D. Rockefeller's 3 mausoleum already erected in Sleepy Hollow; former President Harrison's; William Wrigley's; the monument at Washington's birthplace; and the Calvin Coolidge family memorial.

“Actually this Guild is a modern version of the guilds of the middle ages and the present granite associations in Scotland.” Birnie Bruce lit a cigarette. “My father used to say it was natural for the Scotch to be the first granite-cutters to come to Barre. Aberdeen is a great granite center. The 'Granite City' it's called. Many of its buildings are of a gray stone similar to ours. The granite industry in Barre started about 125 years ago. Robert Parker was the first quarrier, and he left the business to enter the War of 1812. It wasn't until 1880 that the industry rose to great importance. At this time the workers were chiefly Scotch immigrants, and now the Italians started coming. Of the Barre granite workers the Italians form the largest group, and they are superior an sculptors and carvers. Most of them came from the North of Italy, a hardier lot than those from the South. From 1880 to 1910 there were

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also such immigrants as Swedes, Norwegians, Welsh, Irish, Swiss-Italian. The French-Canadian wave started about 1920, just prior to the big Strike.

“The workers have had their troubles. I've lived through most of Barre's labor troubles, and I know that although there were agitators and ill-advised stonecutters, they were not the basic causes of the Strike. The causes went deeper. We were slowly emerging from the long working-day. Men wanted more time with their families, and time to do the countless odd jobs their homes necessitated. And they wanted more money, 4 they were no longer content to enjoy the bare necessities of life. But mostly they wanted the elimination of dust. That was always a sore spot. I don't blame them. I know what I'm talking about. My father, brother, and three uncles all died from stonecutters' t.b. When I started in this business we had a ten-hour working day. Now It's eight.

“The introduction of the pneumatic tool gave rise to the first real attempt to combat silicosis. On fine work the man stooped over a stone, the dust was inhaled in the lungs. The pneumatic tool caused more deaths than the hand ones because they cut stone so fast there was more dust in the air. After discussions and heated arguments it became compulsory to have large dust-removing machines in every shed. And in 1938, it was made compulsory for individual cutters to have smaller suction attachments. There's no reason now why granitecutters shouldn't be as healthy as carpenters.

“In the old days we had no such thing as pneumatic tools. Now both quarries and sheds have compressed air machines, Granitecutters had to be skilled, one twist of the wrist and an entire stone was spoiled. They were so skilled they could take a rough draft and from that chisel a monument with every detail of line perfect. They envisioned the entire monument from some rough sketch.

“Now lettering and ornamentation are done by sandblast, and large saws do the surface cutting. I can remember years ago when only one block would be cut at one time in the quarries; now twenty or thirty are cut at the same time. This by means of the circular saw

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which works backwards, just the reverse 5 of the ordinary saw. Machinery of this type has displaced many workers. We claim that the granite industry is, if not the oldest, at least one of the oldest in civilization. Before tailors, before tentmakers, there were granite cutters. I know it's a shame to have machinery displace so many men engaged in this ancient industry, but machines work fast and cheap, and we have to fill the demand for stone."